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EDWARD E. GELLENDER.

CANCER IN IRELAND: AN ECONOMIC QUESTION

READERS of THE EMPIRE REVIEW are familiar with the facts, and arguments used by me to prove that the physical deterioration of the classes which furnish the majority of our recruits is due to defective nutrition from insufficient and unsuitable food.* My present object is to show that cancerous diseases, which occur later in life, are caused by the long-continued consumption of unwholesome animal-food, and that this unwholesomeness is produced by modern economic conditions. I have chosen Ireland as the country which affords the most reliable data, because its economic and social conditions are so simple, the population being chiefly rural, and engaged in agricultural pursuits, and because external influences, which depend upon immigration, are wanting, whereas in England and in Scotland the multiplicity of industries, the number and extent of urban communities, and the complexity of economic and social conditions make the study of so obscure a subject as cancer extremely difficult.

During the past forty years the death-rate from cancerous diseases in all European countries, and in the United States of America has steadily risen, being highest in Bavaria, Denmark, Holland and Norway. So widespread and so continuous is this increase, that it cannot be ascribed to local or accidental causes, but it must be sought for in the growth of new conditions, to a greater or lesser extent, common to all the affected countries, which the people themselves have produced.

The following figures show the progress of the disease in the United Kingdom since 1864:—

The steady increase in the recorded mortality from cancer in all three portions of the United Kingdom is very remarkable. In Ireland in 1864, the first year in which the registration system was in force, the rate of mortality from cancer was 2·7 per 10,000 living. In 1871 it had risen to 3·2; in 1881 to 3·7; in 1891 to 4·6, and, as already stated, in 1901 it reached 6·5. In England (including Wales) in 1864 the rate was 3·9. In 1871 it was 4·2; in 1881 5·2; in 1891 6·9, and in 1900 it had risen to 8·3. In Scotland in 1864

* "Army Organisation: The Recruit," May 1903.

the rate was 4·3; in 1871 it was 4·4; in 1881 5·2; in 1891 6·8; and in 1900 8·0. . . . The total deaths (2,893) from cancer in Ireland, in 1901, consist of 1,296 deaths of males, and 1,597 of females. The male deaths represent 45 in every 100 deaths from this cause, while the female deaths represent a percentage of 55.*

In the researches made by the elder Jenner which led to his great discovery, it was his observation of the occupations of those individuals who suffered from cow-pock which enabled him to trace the connection between that complaint and their employment. So the observation of the occupations of those persons who have died of cancerous diseases affords the only reliable means of successful inquiry. Table VI. of the Official Report quoted above gives the occupations of the 1288 males who died from cancer in Ireland in 1901.† After deducting 5 "other occupations" and 21 "unspecified," there remain 1262 deaths, which are returned under 56 different occupations, of which 509 deaths are recorded under the heading of "farmer;" 5 of "farmers, sons of," and 302 of "labourer," making a total of 816, which is approximately two-thirds of the total number of deaths. Of the remaining third three-fourths were individuals in the same class of life, and exposed to similar social and economic conditions.

Of the total number (2893) deaths of males and females in 1901, cancerous diseases of the digestive system amounted to 1583, namely, 849 of males, and 734 of females, which represent fractionally $\frac{15}{28}$ of the whole. When other organs of the body are the seat of the disease, the parts primarily affected are those engaged in their nutrition. Hence there is a strong presumption that it is the food which is at fault, and it enforces the obligation that all food should be perfect "after its kind." This is a duty which has been neglected by Christian nations; we have failed to appreciate at their true sanitary value the laws of Moses in regard to animal-food.

In the same report some general causes are suggested to account for the increasing mortality of cancerous diseases in Ireland since 1864, and in regard to County Armagh, where the mortality was highest in 1901, namely 10·6 per 10,000 of the population, some local and special causes are assigned. Of the general causes the first is heredity, but it is difficult to dissociate that cause from the fact that the conditions of living of children

* Supplement to the thirty-eighth Detailed Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Marriages, Births, and Deaths in Ireland. Special Report on Cancer in Ireland 1903.

† This total is less by 8 than the total number of deaths of males shown on Table II. as having occurred in 1901. The majority of deaths is generally of males; for them a table of occupations is required, which should include the occupations of their fathers, and in the case of married women, and widows, of their husbands also.

and of their parents are identical, and consequently the same results may follow; however, it must be conceded that increased vulnerability is most probably hereditary. Contagion is also thought a factor, in which opinion I concur, but I believe the channel of ingress to be restricted. Recent bacterial discoveries point to cancer being not only transmissible from individual to individual, but also between men and animals. Tuberculosis is suggested, but in England, while tuberculosis is decreasing, the mortality from cancer is increasing. May it not be that deficient and unwholesome food is the cause, in the case of the young it is associated with growth, and in the fully-matured and old with repair. How serious the question of nutrition is to the Irish poor, of affecting their mental and physical conditions, and their liability to constitutional diseases, the following statement will show:—

One of Dr. Warner's tables embraces 50,000 English, Irish, and Jewish children, and shows a percentage of low nutrition varying between about 4 to 6, and of mental dulness varying between 6 and 14, Irish children being 50 to 100 per cent. (approximately) worse than English or Jewish children who stand nearly equal.*

Intemperance and smoking are also alleged causes of cancer, but adequate consideration does not seem to have been given to the fact that cancerous diseases are more common among women moreover, so far as I can judge, the results of my present inquiries do not support this contention, both smoking and drinking being less at the present time among the classes who are chiefly affected. Cancerous diseases are also ascribed to syphilis but syphilis is a rare disease among the small farmers and labourers of Ireland, whose sexual morality, to say nothing of Irish women, is the highest in Europe. Sites of wounds and injuries, and those parts of the body which are subject to irritation, are stated to be specially liable to become diseased. Quite true. But that holds good of other constitutional disease such as rheumatism, which fastens on joints which have been sprained; in neither case can injury be considered the cause of these constitutional manifestations.

The local causes which the medical profession consider to be operative in the County Armagh are referable to climate, such as dampness, proximity to rivers and woods, geological formation, sub-soil contamination, and insanitary environment generally, but these things have been always existent in Ireland, and the cannot have suddenly become so pestilential. The special causes which are referred to are all dietetic. Thus one observer states that "the part of the body mostly affected is the stomach," and

* Report of the Royal Commission of Physical Training (Scotland), Vol. I., 1906

considers that this is due, in great measure, "to the description of the food used by the people generally." Tea-drinking, and improper and partially cooked food are also mentioned as causes.

From this history of cancer in Ireland, and the comparison of its mortality with that of England and Scotland, it is clear that two questions require to be investigated; the first is that cancer has steadily increased in Ireland during the past forty years, and the second is that the mortality is much lower than in England and in Scotland. The answers to both these questions, paradoxical as it may appear, are the same; it is the *poverty* of the Irish people.

During the three months I have spent in Ireland prosecuting this inquiry, I have made careful search into the probable causes of this increased mortality, and I find that there is no new factor other than the economic one. The food of the people is entirely different. This change dates from the Irish famine, and has been facilitated by steam transport; coincident with the increased import of cheap food has been the increase of mortality from cancerous diseases. Up to the time of the famine the people lived upon what the country itself produced, their diet being oatmeal porridge, potatoes, eggs and milk, with fish and home-cured bacon occasionally. Now cheap American bacon and flour pancakes cooked in bacon fat, Indian meal porridge sweetened with chemically-coloured beet sugars, and boiled tea are the staple food commodities of the people. Tillage land has been converted into pasturage, and its produce, including eggs and butter, is exported. With part of the proceeds the small farmer and labourer supply their families with cheap imported food. The following extract, from a letter written by Mr. T. W. Russell, though used by me for another purpose, proves how vast has been the change.

When the real economic argument is approached it seems impossible that a tax upon food can benefit the mass of the people in Ireland. The Irish masses are, in the main, consumers—buyers not sellers. In large numbers they are struggling slowly upwards into the light. The baker's cart now goes everywhere—even into the remotest parts of the country. American bacon and flour are largely used by the poor. Indian meal, alas! is still a necessary in the Western regions, and Chamberlainism means a certain rise in the price of all those articles of food. I say nothing of beef, because with the great mass of the people it is not an article of consumption at all.*

The want of variety in the food, and with the exception of potatoes, the almost total absence of vegetables is injurious to health, but it limits the field of inquiry, and makes my task the

* Letter of Mr. T. W. Russell, M.P., in the *Manchester Guardian*, quoted by the *Irish Daily Independent and Nation* of September 21, 1903.

easier. It is evident that a diet of this kind is deficient in nutritious qualities. I have come to the conclusion that it accounts for the revolution in national habits, which has taken place during the past forty years, namely the substitution of porter and tea-drinking for whisky. Men take porter to supplement their food, and when they have not got the money to buy it, they, like women, take tea to lessen the cravings of hunger.

The second conclusion which I have come to is that this food is unwholesome. The imported flour is inferior and lacks some of the most important constituents of wheat, it is also wanting in freshness. In the hamlet where I am now staying for the purposes of this inquiry there is a mill which grinds two thousand tons of Indian corn annually to supply the surrounding district, which is sparsely inhabited by a dwindling population. The consumption of tea is enormous. A labourer, whose weekly wage amounts to seven shillings and sixpence, and with no family but his wife, buys each week half a pound of tea costing one shilling and fourpence; they could not afford it, but his wife keeps some fowls and sells the eggs. With such a mode of living it is impossible for the digestive organs to continue healthy.

It is unwholesome *animal* food which I believe to be the direct cause of cancer, and which in Ireland consists of cheap American bacon; very little other "flesh meat," as they term it is eaten, the peasant farmer and labourer are too poor to buy it. The bacon is chiefly fried. "If we had cabbage," they say, "surely we would boil the bacon with it." With a peat fire and without proper utensils it is only half-cooked, and goes further the fat not being lost; the father and mother eat the bacon, and the children get the gravy fat. I am informed that American pigs are turned loose in the cattle yards, and root among the refuse food and undigested corn. Also that pigs are fed on the entrails of poultry and on the offal of slaughtered cattle, and on the carcasses of diseased animals. From another source I learn that pigs suffering from disease, probably malignant, are slaughtered, and the lard from them is rendered to be used in the manufacture of margarine and other food products.

Should it be conceded, as I believe it will be in the near future, that unwholesome animal food is the cause of cancerous disease, then it is not difficult to understand that the mortality-rate in England and in Scotland is so much higher when the consumption of meat is so much larger. Alas! the poorer classes in Ireland cannot afford to use meat as a food, only as a relish. Probably the legend of "potatoes and point" is not known to the reader; it depicts a state of things in Ireland which existed before the era of cheap food imports, and when the staple food was potato.

which, when peeled, were made more palatable by gently rubbing them against a cooked salt herring or piece of bacon suspended by a string; this relish did duty for many mouths.

It has not been sufficiently considered that the unwholesomeness of animal flesh may be caused otherwise than by disease. A store bullock may be in the pink of condition, so far as appearance goes, and yet its flesh may be, on this very account, an inferior article of diet. The measures taken to prevent the importation of cattle from proscribed countries have more for their object the protection of our own herds than the health of the people. The pecuniary loss is what is considered; for the flesh of animals which have been slaughtered because of disease is, in some instances, allowed to be sold, if only the diseased parts are removed. The relationship between the diseases of men and animals has only recently obtained the recognition it deserves. So little was it understood, that it was only in 1894 that the War Office substituted coir mattresses for the straw palliasses previously in use, though I had, in 1884 in India, and in 1888 to the War Office, pointed out the grave danger to health of returning to the farm-yard straw after three months' use in the barrack-room. In the researches I made in India between 1880 and 1903 in relation to the prevalence of enteric fever among British troops I found that the flesh of animals, when not perceptibly diseased, yet gave unmistakable proof that its food and sanitary environment were objectionable.

The conditions which cause the unwholesomeness of live stock, other than disease, are referable to their breeding, sheltering, and feeding, and of their flesh, after slaughter, and food products manufactured from it, to the changes which subsequently take place. All three conditions in the management of live stock have been neglected or misunderstood in the three portions of the United Kingdom. In breeding cattle for slaughter purposes the object aimed at is to develop size and weight at the earliest age attainable so as to make the greatest profit in the shortest possible space of time. It is the commercial value and not the nutritive and health-giving properties which is considered. It is only by allowing the animal to come to maturity that the juices and fibre of the meat become most nutritious. The breeding-in and in of cattle in Ireland is notorious. The history of the potato blight and its prevention by fresh seed ought to have taught the danger. Nature gives the warning, but in the desire of immediate gain it is forgotten or neglected.

The sheltering of store cattle is altogether too artificial; confinement and warmth tend to the deposit of fat, but not to the growth of healthy tissue, which requires air and exercise. Places of shelter should be away from dwellings and poultry runs, and

they should be well drained. In Ireland the peasant and his pig no longer lodge together, for the presence of cattle in human dwellings is now a punishable offence, but still at the peasant's door and under his window are festering dung-heaps in which pigs wallow and ducks and hens feed.

The use of artificial foods for cattle, like breeding, is intended for rapid growth and fattening, but their effect upon the flesh for food purposes, and upon the health of the consumer, receives little attention. Equally applicable is this remark to the use of fertilisers, including sewage farms and ensilage. The application of manure to land should be always followed by ploughing, and when it is to be laid down in pasturage root crops should be first cultivated. At the present time cattle are put upon grass land too soon after it has been top-dressed; the sanitary objections are self-evident.

Cattle slaughtered abroad, and all imported food products in the manufactured state, must be looked upon with suspicion both in regard to the increasing mortality from cancer, and to the physical deterioration of certain classes of the population who are the greatest consumers; their relation to each other is not mere coincidence but it is cause and effect. In any change of the fiscal policy of the Empire the health of the people must be considered as well as the cheapness of food supplies; so far as Ireland is concerned the picture I give is of grave significance, for, if landlords disappear, there will be less money spent in the country and free trade will effect no improvement in the economic conditions of the people.

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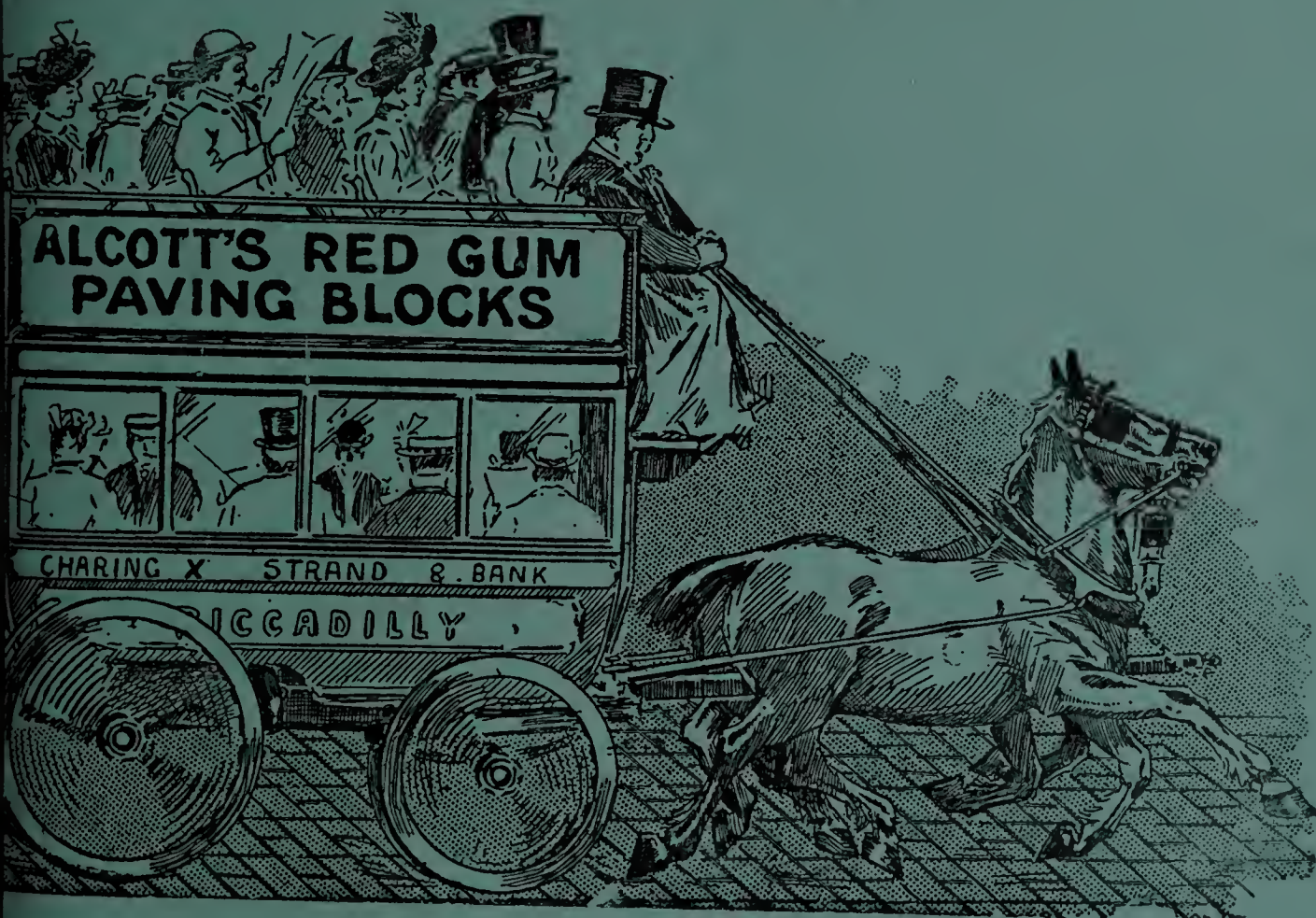
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